



United States Research: Gulf South Region

Lyn Rasmussen, Research Specialist

Overview

United States Gulf South Region includes the following states: Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, and Arkansas. These states are grouped together because of their similar history and background which affects the records created and used to solve genealogical problems. These states have similar migration and settlement patterns, similar county jurisdictions and record loss, similar economy, and slavery; therefore, these states are also similar in the types of records created. The following six record types will be discussed: land, probate, tax, church, court, and Confederate pension records. Federal records will not be discussed in this presentation, including government vital records.

History and Background

Early settlement and migration

The most common settlement and migration pattern is movement into the area from other states, especially southern states. As Indian lands opened for sale, settlers poured in. Another migration factor was the depletion of soils in the Mid-South region and the search for new and more fertile land. During the late 1800s and into the 20th century, immigrant settlement increased.

County jurisdictions

All the states use counties as the political jurisdiction. Louisiana refers to its counties as parishes. As the population grew, new counties were formed out of existing counties. It is important to be aware of these changes so that you are conducting your research in the correct record sets.

Burned counties

When a county is referred to as a "burned county" it means that the area has suffered record loss. Record loss is caused by wars, floods, tornados, cleaning projects, ignorant clerks, and records that just "walk away" as well as from fire. The Gulf South Region has seen variety of disasters, including war. Record loss is moderate to high through the region and creative means are needed to compensate.

Economy

Mild climate and fertile soil supported an agrarian society, making land records very valuable for genealogical research. Only about 10% of the people lived in urban areas. Lack of available land and depletion of the soil created a southern migration to all parts of the south and many parts of the west.

Slavery

All the states in the Gulf South Region were slave states into the 19th century and all were Confederate states. Importation of slaves into the United States ended in 1807, which created a thriving slave market within these states as slave owners in the Mid-South began to export slaves to the Gulf South region.

Helpful Resources general state and county

FS Research Wiki article *[state name] United States Genealogy*

FS Research Wiki article *[state name, county name] County*

Helpful Resources migration

FS Research Wiki article *US Migration Trails and Roads*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/US_Migration_Trails_and_Roads

FS Research Wiki article *Fall Line Road*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Fall_Line_Road

FS Research Wiki article *[state name] Emigration and Immigration*

Helpful Resources burned counties

FS Research Wiki article *Burned Counties Research*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Burned_Counties_Research

Helpful Resources slavery

FS Research Wiki article *African American Slavery and Bondage*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/African_American_Slavery_and_Bondage

Helpful Resources for research logs

FS Research Wiki article *Research Logs* https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Research_Logs

FS Research Wiki article *Keeping a Research Log*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Keeping_a_Research_Log

FS Research Wiki article *Document AS YOU GO!*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Document_AS_YOU_GO!

FS Webinar *Research Logs part 1* by David Dilts

<https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/45>

FS Webinar *Research Logs part 2* by David Dilts

<https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/46>

Key Records

Land Records

The availability of land attracted many immigrants to America and encouraged westward expansion. Land ownership was generally recorded in an area as soon as settlers began to arrive. Land records are primarily used genealogically to learn where an individual lived and when he lived there. They often reveal family information such as the name of a spouse, heir, other relatives, or neighbors. You may learn where a person lived previously, his occupation, if he had served in the military, if he was a naturalized citizen, and other clues for further research.

Helpful Resources for land records

FS Research Wiki article *United States Land and Property*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Land_and_Property

FS Research Wiki article *[state name] Land and Property*

FS Research Wiki article *Metes and Bounds*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Metes_and_Bounds

FS Webinar *United States Land Records* by Marilyn Markham

<https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/1004>

FS Webinar *Homestead Records* by Roberta "Bobbi" King

<https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/179>

FS Webinar *U.S. Measurement and Distribution of Public Land States* by Billie Stone Fogarty

<https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/331>

FS Webinar *Sections, Ranges and Townships* by Roberta "Bobbi" King

<https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/180>

Probate Records

Probate records are court records created after an individual's death that relate to a court's decisions regarding the distribution of the estate to the heirs or creditors and the care of dependents. This process took place whether there was a will (testate) or not (intestate). Various types of records are created throughout the probate process. These may include bonds, petitions, accounts, inventories, administrations, orders, decrees, and distributions. These documents are extremely valuable to genealogists and should not be neglected. Probate records are essential for research because they often pre-date the birth and death records kept by civil authorities.

Helpful Resources for probate records

FS Research Wiki article *United States Probate Records*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Probate_Records

FS Research Wiki article *[state name] Probate Records*

FS Webinar *United States Probate Records* by Tim Bingaman

<https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/485>

Tax Records

Governments have collected taxes in the United States since the colonial era. Tax records vary in content according to the purpose of the assessment. They may include the name and residence of the taxpayer, occupation, description of the real estate and name of the original purchaser, description of some personal property, number of males over 21, and the number of school children, slaves, and farm animals. Annual tax lists can help establish ages, residences, relationships, and the year an individual died or left the area. They can be used in the place of missing or destroyed land and census records.

Some of the early records are called quitrents, tithables, and poll (head) taxes. Quitrents are records of property taxes paid to a proprietor or the crown. Tithables and poll or head taxes are lists of persons subject to taxation regardless of their personal assets. Depending on local laws, males were usually taxable at the ages of 16, 18, or 21 through about age 50 or 60, with some exceptions for veterans, ministers, paupers, and others. Most tax records were eventually based on personal property, real estate, and income.

Helpful Resources for tax records

FS Research Wiki article *United States Taxation*

FS Research Wiki article *[state name] Taxation*

Church Records

The United States is a country of religious diversity. Unlike many other countries, there has been no “state church,” except for a few periods in some of the early colonies. Church records in the United States began in the early 1600s. Sometimes church records are the only records containing birth, marriage, and death. Therefore, they are a valuable substitute when vital records do not exist.

Your ancestor may have changed denominations for reasons of convenience or conviction. When the family moved to a new community, they may have started attending a church located there, or they may have changed denominations by conversion.

Helpful Resources for Church Records

FS Wiki article *United States Church Records*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Church_Records

FS Webinar *United States Church Records* by Joni Kesler

<https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/41>

Court Records

Court records are usually searched after other records have already been investigated, but they should not be overlooked. Court records can establish family relationships and places of residence. They often provide occupations, descriptions of individuals, and other excellent family history information. Unfortunately, court records tend to be difficult to use. The records are usually not well-indexed. It is helpful to understand the many legal terms and abbreviations.

Helpful Resources for Court Records

FS Research Wiki article *[state name] Court Records*

FS Research Wiki article *United States Court Records*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Court_Records

FS Webinar *United States Court Records* by Tim Bingaman

<https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/479>

Military Records

Confederate military records are held on the state level. All other Civil War records are held on the Federal level.

Helpful Resources for Military and Military Draft Records

FS Research Wiki article *[state name] Military Records*

FS Research Wiki article *United States Military Records*

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Military_Records

FS Webinar *Selective Service Records (WWI) Draft Cards and More* by Linda Woodward

Geiger <https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/201>